

# *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*

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## Editorial

### Improving the Newsletter

I am conscious that there is considerable room for improvement in the quality of this publication, and I intend to take the following steps. On the suggestion of Lavkumar Khacher, I will avoid the large number of references which usually accompany articles which are published. In some cases the "references are longer than the main piece". I will only include such references which are really important. One assumes that most writers consult the Handbook, the Pictorial Guide and other books before they put themselves into print.

The other step which I want to take is to shorten articles where necessary to make them more effective. Unnecessary verbiage often detracts from the value of the piece. If any contributor wants his article to be reproduced verbatim, he must write to the Editor, in which case it will either be accepted or rejected.

I see that a number of contributors to the Newsletter have now started to write for the Oriental Bird Club publications. This is most heartening for it shows that the Newsletter has acted as a stepping stone for novices to advance on the ladder of ornithology. But I hope they will not forget the Newsletter completely.

I must confess that I continue to use the old English names of birds and quite often the old scientific names. I don't intend to change the old English names whatever the experts might say. In course of time I hope I will be able to introduce the latest scientific jargon as far as scientific names are concerned.

Finally, may I repeat an appeal which I made some time ago. The Newsletter should be a source of pleasure for birdwatchers and instead of merely sending out a list of birds seen in a locality, it would be nice to get an account of the environment and of the many beautiful scenes which birdwatchers are privileged to encounter during their outings. This is what made the writing of ornithologists and naturalists in the early years of this century so interesting.

### Watching Common Birds

The usual tendency of a birder on sighting a common bird is to make a mental or pencil note about its presence and that is about all. But one could attempt to be more involved. For example, when we hear one or more

coppersmiths calling tuk-tuk-tuk-tuk endlessly, we could recall what T.C. Jerdon attempted to do. Which direction does the sound come from and why does it appear to come from different directions at different times from the bird sitting in the same place? Is the call of two or more birds identical - or is there a difference in the pitch and tone? Jerdon writes (Page 316, Vol.I, Birds of India) "The sound often appears to come from a different direction to that from which it does really proceed; and this appears to me to depend on the direction of the bird's head when uttering the call. Mr. Philipps accounts for it by saying that it alters the intensity of its call. Sundervall remarks that "the same individual always utters the same note, but that two are seldom heard to make it exactly alike." I also think that when two birds are nearby there is a compulsion for both to communicate with each other. Do we ever see one coppersmith "hammering" away and the other silent?

#### Kihim Diary, 10-4-96 to 26-5-96

We arrived in Kihim on our annual pilgrimage on 10th April. It was cheering to hear from my son that he had recently seen a pair of blackcapped kingfishers (*Halcyon pileata*). I had seen a single bird on the rocks on the sea front in the 1950s and perhaps never again. When Salim Ali queried my identification I said that apart from its lovely coral red bill, black head and white collar, its wing pattern in flight, with its white patches, was similar to a myna's. No further cross examination was necessary. I am surprised that this bird is included in Salim Ali's Book of Indian Birds (8th Edition and others) as it is not a very common bird (or am I wrong?). Lavkumar Khacher has written about the close connection between this kingfisher and mangroves. There are still some stretches of mangroves in the creeks behind Kihim, but they are all under great "pressure" as is the case everywhere.

The whitebellied sea eagle pair was seen and heard (nasal kenk- kenk-kenk) several times. Nothing more elegant exists in the bird world. The calls suggested that the birds were nesting (season October to June) and I was told of a nest high up in a casuarina. Casuarina is an exotic plant and yet it is the favourite nesting site for our eagle.

Last year I had written that only the male crow pheasants were calling (*coop coop coop coop*) and the females hardly ever answered back. This year the situation was very different and there were frequent duets between the birds. This is a species which seems to be holding its own not merely in rural but also in our urban areas. Its nest is well protected "in the centre of a tangled thorny shrub at moderate height", and its wide range of food from caterpillars to birds eggs and nestlings keeps the race going - at the cost of some of the smaller species. But I like the sight of this bird walking purposefully on the ground. Koels were very noisy, *kuo-kuo-kuo-*, *chik, chik, chik*, and the bubbling rattle of the female. There were several banyan trees fruiting so there was plenty of food for birds.

Grey hornbills (*Tockus birostris*) with the casque on the long curved bill were commonly seen. One pair was nesting on a casuarina (season March to June). It is comic the way they survey the world moving their necks so slowly from side to side.

I see from the Oriental Bird Club Bulletin No. 21 of July 95, that Divya Mudappa has been given a grant of £500/- to study the nesting habit of the Malabar grey hornbill, the bird without the casque, formerly known as *Tockus griseus*, and now *Ocyrceros griseus*. 27 nests have been located. "Most of the cavities were formed due to wood rot ... Therefore the practice of ..... removal of trees with cavities on the basis that they are diseased, will also be deleterious to the hornbills and must be stopped."

On 12th April among the birds on the beach I saw a green shank which seemed in poor shape and on the 18th, Badr Amir Ali and a friend with a video camera photographed a shahin falcon on a casuarina on the beach eating a water bird. The falcon was seen again on the following day, but the green shank was not seen again. I am putting two and two together but I may be wrong.

On the morning of 27th April, a pair of goldenbacked woodpeckers, a pair of jungle mynas and 4 magpie robins seemed to be fighting for accommodation on a casuarina which has for years been used by the dayals for nesting. Are we running short of nesting holes? Then a female paradise flycatcher arrived and watching the squabble in progress seemed to say "why don't you make your own home as I do".

In the village Pond, a stately purple heron, pairs of bronzewinged jacanas, yellow (?) wagtails, white-breasted kingfishers and some others appeared to have come to terms with humanity. Fishing and clothes washing around them did not worry them. Incidentally, this is the pond in the middle of which was the famous babul tree on which bayas nested in the thirties and where Salim Ali discovered the polygamous propensities of the bayas. Someone says that bayas are the most numerous land birds of our country. They do not appear to be so to me, in spite of polygamy.

No signs again of ashy swallow shrikes (*Artamus fuscus*) which in the past were so numerous and which were such a joy to see until a few years ago huddled together on palmyra branches and hawking insects even on the sea shore "in graceful sailing flight". I believe the pollutants from the Thull Fertilizer Project may have something to do with it, and may be the consequence of the reduction of winged insects on which these birds lived. I asked Humayan Abdul Ali who happened to be there, whether he agreed. He sent me a note which I reproduce :

"I do not know the actual or main food of Artamus, but there can be little doubt that the insect poisoning which has been carried out in our fields has killed off the larger free-flying insects or at least reduced their numbers. You will also see a similar decline in numbers of rufous-backed shrikes, blue jays, white-eyed buzzards, palm swifts(?) and many others."

On the morning of 9th May, I thought I heard the lovely breeding song of the white-throated ground thrush. It is not an easy call to describe, except that it is ventriloquistic and leaves you wondering about the direction from which the sound comes. But on the same day I saw the bird behaving just like a jungle babbler rummaging among the leaves on the ground. It is such a relief to come across species which one fears are disappearing - all be it locally.

One wonderful sight today was of a whitebrowed bulbul almost on the ground under a teak tree. This was at 5.10 p.m. sunset 7 p.m. so the light was perfect, and I was taken aback by the beauty of the combination of its sober colours. Birds should inform humankind that it is not necessary to be gaudy to be beautiful.

On the 11th May I walked up to Kankeshwar Hill which still has an evergreen forest patch at the top. As I walked up the 1000' hill, for quite a while the only birds I saw were Indian robins. But when I reached the evergreen patch I heard the bubbling call of the scimitar babbler, and also of the shama (*Copsychus malabaricus*). During almost every

visit I have been able to see and hear this bird. But this time I could only hear its lovely song "rich in notes and quality." A largish branch of a mango tree, spanning the path on which I saw the bird last year was hacked down, and I saw the sad remains on the ground. There has been considerable hacking of trees even in this rare evergreen patch by the Maharashtra State Electricity Board employees. Can we not plan a "wireless" environment even in a Sacred Grove?

This year there were comparatively few shore birds, and I must confess that I cannot distinguish between various species of plovers, kentish, grey, golden and others, even with the help of that excellent book "A field Guide to the Waterbirds of Asia" published by the Wild Bird Society of Japan. Their plumages vary so much depending on the time of the year. On 20th May, at 5.30 p.m. (sunset 7.10 p.m.) a large flock of over 35 grey plovers and a single whimbrel were seen. I noticed that as the tide came in the birds rushed into the water, did an about turn and with their backs to the sun started picking up food vigorously from the water.

I look forward to seeing all these birds next year.



## Hawking technique of the Hobby *Falco Subbuteo*

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**T**he hobby is a winter visitor to Maharashtra, and in Pune can be commonly seen in open wooded country or around cultivated areas, perched on telegraph and electricity poles. The bird is often seen singly, and sometimes 2-3 birds can be seen together hawking at dusk. Occasionally it is accompanied by its bigger resident cousin the shahin falcon *Falco peregrinus pergrinator*.

On 22nd November 1995. I had been to Akshi, a seashore village near Alibag 18° 40'N and 72° 53'E, Raigad Dist., Maharashtra). Around 6 o'clock in the evening, I was roaming on the beach, on the edge of a large Casuarina equisetifolia plantation. While observing a large but scattered flock of swallows my attention was attracted towards a tight flock of 12 to 14 larger birds (as compared to swallows) that were flying high up in the sky, at least 250 feet high. It was a very unusual sight since they looked like falcons with pointed wings very similar to the hobby.

The flock was very active, flying swiftly; twisting and turning sharply. They were accompanied by swallows *Hirundo daurica*, but not a single bird attacked the swallows. Ultimately, after a minute or so, they lost height considerably. Two of them split from the group and arrived on the top of a Casuarina tree, and then rejoined the flock. I could readily identify the birds with my 8x30 binoculars when they came close. I could see the blackish head clearly with moustachial streaks. I could also see the longitudinally streaked underparts (that separate the hobby from the peregrine falcon) and rufous thighs. Also the birds were smaller than

the peregrine falcon. To my surprise, it was indeed a flock of hobbies.

I observed the flock for 6 to 8 minutes till it disappeared behind the trees. What I could guess from the twisting flight was that they were chasing winged insects. Although their food includes small birds (like swallows) and pipistrelle bats etc. (see Ali S., and Ripley S.D.), and both of them were available there, they were not chasing either of them. I was greatly surprised to see such a rare gathering of hobbies, since I had neither seen it before nor had I heard any of my birdwatcher friends had seen it.

I suppose the advantage of hawking together is that the birds disturb a mass of flying insects and disburse them and insects escaping from one bird may be caught by another. However, I could not observe the hawking too closely and so I cannot comment on the later possibility.

When I returned, I consulted the Compact Handbook of Birds of India and Pakistan by Ali and Ripley. To my great surprise, I found a reference to the above mentioned behaviour. In the book they write "sometimes (the hobby) hawks winged insects in a loose flock of ten or more birds in the manner of swifts, high up in the air, turning, twisting, rising, falling, circling around and darting at the quarry with great agility. Has been observed thus engaged in association with swallows *H. rustica* and *H. daurica*, which themselves frequently form its prey."

I informed Mr Humayun Abdulali regarding this incident, to which he replied, "I have several sight records of the hobby from near Mumbai, but all singly, not even a pair!"

I would like to mention here that the flock which I observed was a tight one unlike what Dr Salim Ali describes.

I should also restate here that the hobbies were chasing only winged insects and nothing else. I think it would be worthwhile to know if anybody has observed such a behaviour.



## Birding in Nandour Madmeshwar

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**B**irds seem to have an uncanny ability to pick up certain advantageous spots for their sojourn. Take for example Nandour Madmeshwar close to Sinnar-Nitad in Nashik Taluka of Maharashtra. This belt is known for onions and sugar cane.

This place, situated on the banks of river Godavari and near the dyke (more of an irrigation tank whose water flow is regulated to suit the farming around) at Khan gaon thadi, is really a place for bird watchers. A small village with simple folk who mind their own business of farming or cattle/sheep tending, this place looks like any other Indian village. The old Shiva temple — and hence the name Madhmeshwar — which stands above the rocky bed of the river is probably the only attraction for people around to visit this place, especially during Mahashivarathri. Otherwise, the village is deserted all round the year and very few people venture out into this area.

We found this place fascinating because of the cliff swallows which nest on the steep walls of the rock — just opposite to the Shiva temple — overhanging the water running below. The industrious swallows build a funnel of mud attached to the rock with a lateral entrance which serves as a nest to bring up the brood. The rock face is so steep that except for lizards or snakes it is difficult for other predators to gain a perch and rob the nest, though many a times crows try to gain access but unsuccessfully. And the nests are generally on the under side of a rock surface above the water which acts as a further deterrent, since a slip could land you directly into the water below.

The best way to observe these birds is to sit on the rocks opposite sloping down from the temple. The swallows in their typical fashion span out and come in as clouds and seem to be all the time keeping a conversation going between them with their chip-chip calls. Once silence descends, it indicates that caution is to be exercised and no direct entry to the nest is to be made. This invariably occurs whenever a crow or a raptor circles above or sits on the adjacent rocks. The fact that swallows spend most of their time on the wing is well established. They spend hardly a few minutes in the nest.

This is only a part of bird life seen here. The river and the channels and the squelchy fields adjoining them harbour a

number of water fowl. The acacia trees bordering the fields and the channels provide an ideal site for nesting or roosting.

Ducks, mostly shovellers, pintails, pochards, teal and spot bills prefer the channels and they are noticed in the pools and shallow stretches when the water level is low. The herons and their allies, namely spoonbills, open bill storks, grey herons, large egrets, ibises, cranes, etc., prefer the fields inundated or squelchy patches of land. Of course, such a habitat invites a number of waders like curlews, plovers, sandpipers. The reed beds along the channel harbour warblers, conspicuous among them being Franklins wren and ashy wren. We found that this place is a haven for wagtails and at least about seven species could be seen here. Since they were foraging side by side on the marshes one could easily distinguish between them.

It is encouraging to see that the State Forest Department, has posted a guard who is knowledgeable, unlike many in the department, and the DFO also seems to be interested in the bird life of this area.

Lastly, mention has to be made of the Irrigation Department guest house and its compound. This area encompassing a well made boundary with trees and shrubs around, the old British style guest house, harbours a lot of woodland birds and serves as a refuge for them. Notable among the birds seen here are grey hornbills, coucals, sunbirds, warblers, woodpeckers, doves, orioles, redstarts, etc. An hour's stay in this compound could be very rewarding for any beginner and he would certainly be impressed with the life around. A bonus is the purple sunbird's nest on the bougainvillea creeper above the arch facing the guest house as you enter the garden. We only wish that this area is kept as it is rather than being used for constructing more buildings in the name of development.

As we write this, we are afraid of publicising this place thereby leading people to venture out to take up "eco-tourism", as they call it, and spoil the very basis of conservation. We wish to advocate that these places should be conserved as they are, since they are already in the trusted hands of "unspoilt" village folk.



## On Shikras with Red Eyes and Definition of Colours

KUMARAN SATHASIVAM, 29, Jadamuni Koil Street, Madurai 625 001

**D**o shikras ever have red eyes? The Handbook by Ali and Ripley says that the Indian, Ceylon and Burmese shikras all have "golden or orange-yellow" irides, but I have observed at times the shikra eye appearing red. In one instance (1st August 1991, Madurai), I observed from close quarters and in good light a male shikra, the colour of whose eyes I can only describe as blood-red.

Asked about this, V Santharam wrote that he remembered having seen shikras with red eyes too. On his suggestion I sought further information from Professor KK Neelakantan. In his reply, the professor pointed out that Baker and Inglis, in *Birds of Southern India* say that the colour of the shikra's eye is orange, while Salim Ali's *Birds of Kerala* says "Iris of male orange-red, of female bright yellow". Surely, the colour I call "blood-red" cannot be the same as Ali's "orange-red"? Interestingly, according to the Handbook, there is a race of shikra known only from Katchal Island, Nicobars, whose iris is "dark crimson".

This brings up the question of words used to describe colours in natural history in general. We all know that no description of a bird's call or song quite conveys the effect of the "original". Colours are just as bad or worse. Individual perceptions of the meanings of such terms as "vinous", "isabelline" or "ferruginous" tend to vary, without expert guidance. Even descriptions such as "upper parts more grey, less ashy" (the Ceylon shikra compared to the Indian shikra), or "dark smoky brown washed with grey above" (female Indian shikra) can leave much to the imagination of the uninitiated reader. So is there a standard colour reference to define these terms? As the saying goes, there is little that is new under the sun, and the problem must have been considered by others before. For instance, in an old volume of the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* there is a paper titled "On iridescent colours and a method of examining iridescent objects, birds, insects, minerals, etc., so as to ensure uniformity in their description" (Alex Hodgkinson, Vol.8, pp 282-287; this paper is noted as having originally appeared in the *Memoirs and Proceedings of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society*, Vol.5, Part 2).

If a natural history colour standard already exists, then its existence should be made more widely known. If one does not, it would be worthwhile developing one. It could simply assume the form of a shade card, but it would have obvious limitations such as being subject to change during

the printing process and fading with time. It will probably be advantageous to exploit the flexibility offered by computers these days, and create the standard in the form of a software package meant for use with an SVGA monitor. It seems that these monitors are capable of displaying thousands of shades. In the future, therefore, we may be using numbers in lieu of words to describe the plumage of a bird. "I saw this raptor which was 5236 above, 2196 below, with narrow 7752 longitudinal streaks on the throat, and broad 4607 streaks on the breast. It had a prominent crest of a few long 7752 feathers sticking out from the hindcrown. Reading the Handbook (colour-standardized edition) I have identified the bird as an Indian crested hawk-eagle as the description tallies perfectly."

What if it is found that even SVGA monitors literally change their colours with time? One can imagine the standardization being carried out to its logical end in the search for an absolutely invariable definition of names of colours. A handbook of colours will be created, defining each term by means of a table of wavelengths and/or a graph:

### No.341: Plumbeous

Wavelength (nm)	Content (percentage)
656.3-642.8	44.8
435.2-434.1	28.7
405.9-402.6	17.6
401.6-401.2	8.9



Armed with such unshakable accuracy, we can then proceed to describe our birds with devastating precision: "the tail feathers were purplish violet (Colour Handbook No.741), only there was about 2.5% greater content of 404.7 nm, and a streak of yellow (No.952, but with only 3.2% of 579 nm) was seen near the greenish (No.711, the 546.1 nm peak more pronounced) rump". Until that day when we are colour-standardized, we must make do with the ambiguous jargon we currently employ. However, on reflection, this parlance is not entirely without its merits.

### Acknowledgement

I am grateful to Dr George Michael who read this note and offered his suggestions and encouragement.







## Birds of D'Ering memorial wildlife sanctuary, Arunachal Pradesh

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The D'Ering Memorial Wildlife Sanctuary (20°53'-28°10'N, 90°23'-95°30'E) is situated in the East Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh and spreads over an area of about 190 sq kms between Siang and Sibia river, and is located 16 kms southeast of Pashighat town.

From 27.01.96 to 30.01.96, I visited the sanctuary for birdwatching and sighted a number of avifauna.

Divided into three managerial ranges Anchalthat, Sibiamukh and Barghuli the sanctuary consists of semi-evergreen forest, fast flowing river channels and river islands with unconsolidated rocky beds, riverine marshes and abundant grasslands. About 50% of the sanctuary is grassland where *Saccharum spontaneum*, *Sarundinaceum*, *Neyraudia reynaudiana*, *Thysanolaena maxima*, *Chrysopogon* sedges like *Cyperus* spp., *Scripus* spp., *Fimbristylis* spp. etc. are common. *Terminalia myriocarpa*, *Dillenia indica*, *Bombax ceiba*, *Lagerstroemia speciosa*, *Albizia* spp. etc. are the common trees in the forests.

Numerous channels formed by the river Siang constitute the main waterfowl habitat of the sanctuary. These lotic wetlands invite a great number of wintering waterfowl most of which are ducks. In a few seasonal small sized forested wetlands resident waterbirds make their home. A total number of 113 species were recorded during the period in the sanctuary. The endangered Bengal florican *Eupodotis bengalensis* was the most important sighting during these days. The forest guards also reported the presence of white winged wood duck *Cairina scutulata*, greylag goose *Anser anser* and spotbilled pelican *Pelecanus philippensis*. They clearly identified these three birds in the waterfowl handbook carried by me.

Though the sanctuary supports a rich biodiversity, great pressure like thach collection, and livestock grazing has an impact on its ecology. Unauthorised timber operations are quite common in some parts like Barghuli, Japang and Balun. Poaching is almost open in some parts. The tremendous hunting pressure on each and every species has brought a big question mark on the future of the sanctuary. During the four-day survey in the sanctuary, we met about 50 persons who were directly involved in poaching or illegal timber operations. During the dry season in the large grassland areas they just burn the dry thach from one side and wait for the helpless animals on the other side. During night, they poach animals using four-wheel drive vehicles with high power lights. Both of these methods were seen by the survey team. Due to the improper infrastructure and shortage of forest staff the authorities cannot do anything. Once the Swamp Deer, Water Buffalo, Hog Deer, Wild Pig, Tiger etc. were very common in the sanctuary but today these animals are rarely seen.

Sl. No.	Ref. No.	Name	Scientific name
<b>Family : Podicipedidae</b>			
1	3	Great crested grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
<b>Family : Phalacrocoracidae</b>			
2	26	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
3	27	Indian shag	<i>P. ruficollis</i>
4	28	Little cormorant	<i>P. niger</i>
5	29	Darter	<i>A. rula</i>
<b>Family : Ardeidae</b>			
6	36	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
7	38	Little green heron	<i>Ardeola striatus</i>
8	42	Pond heron	<i>Ardea grayii</i>
9	44	Cattle egret	<i>Bulbulcus ibis</i>
10	46	Large egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
11	47	Smaller egret	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>
12	49	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
13	52	Night heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
<b>Family : Anatidae</b>			
14	88	Lesser whistling teal	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>
15	90	Ruddy shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>
16	93	Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>
17	94	Common teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>
18	97	Spotbilled duck	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>
19	100	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
20	101	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>
21	103	Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>
22	105	Shoveller	<i>Anas clypeata</i>
23	108	Common pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>
24	111	Tufted duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>
25	114	Cotton teal	<i>Nettion coromandelianus</i>
26	118	Goldeneye duck	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>
27	120	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>
<b>Family : Accipitridae</b>			
28	124	Blackwinged kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
29	135	Brahminy kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>
30	147	Sparrow hawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
31	171	Lesser spotted eagle	<i>Aquila pomarina</i>
32	181	Himalayan griffon	<i>Gyps himalayensis</i>
33	182	Longbilled vulture	<i>Gyps indicus</i>
34	185	Whitebacked vulture	<i>Gyps bengalensis</i>
35	192	Pied harrier	<i>Circus melanoleucos</i>
36	196	Crested serpent eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>
<b>Family : Falconidae</b>			
37	221	Lesser kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>

**Family : Phasianidae**

38	247	Swamp partridge	<i>Francolinus gularis</i>
39	255	Jungle bush quail	<i>Perdica asiatica</i>
40	267	Common hill partridge	<i>Arborophila torqueola</i>

**Family : Otidae**

41	356	Bengal florican	<i>Eupodotis bengalensis</i>
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**Family : Rostratulidae**

42	429	Painted snipe	<i>Rostratula benghalensis</i>
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**Family : Burhinidae**

43	437	Great stone plover	<i>Esacus magirostris</i>
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**Family : Glareolidae**

44	444	Small indian pratincole	<i>Glareola lactea</i>
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**Family : Charadriidae**

45	364	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>
46	365	Greyheaded lapwing	<i>Vanellus cinereus</i>
47	366	Redwattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>
48	369	Spurwinged lapwing	<i>Vanellus spinosus</i>
49	380	Little ringed plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
50	395	Marsh sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>
51	396	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
52	401	Common sandpiper	<i>Tringa hypoleucos</i>
53	409	Fantailed snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>

**Family : Laridae**

54	453	Great blackheaded gull	<i>Larus ichthyastus</i>
55	454	Brownheaded gull	<i>Larus brunneiceps</i>
56	455	Blackheaded gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>
57	463	Indian river tern	<i>Sterna aurantia</i>
58	484	Indian skimmer	<i>Rynchops albicollis</i>

**Family : Columbidae**

59	495	Green pigeon	<i>Treron curvirostra</i>
60	534	Indian ringed dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
61	537	Spotted dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>

**Family : Psittacidae**

62	546	Alexandrine parakeet	<i>Pisittacula eupatria</i>
63	550	Rose ringed parakeet	<i>Pisittacula krameri</i>

**Family : Cuculidae**

64	572	Large hawk-cuckoo	<i>Cuculus sparverioides</i>
65	573	Common hawk-cuckoo	<i>Cuculus fugax</i>
66	576	Indian cuckoo	<i>Cuculus micropterus</i>
67	600	Crow-pheasant	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>

**Family : Strigidae**

68	652	Spotted owl	<i>Athene brama</i>
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**Family : Caprimulgidae**

69	680	Common Indian nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus macrurus</i>
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**Family : Apodidae**

70	699	Large whiterumped swift	<i>Apus pacificus</i>
71	703	House swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>

**Family : Alcedinidae**

72	719	Lesser pied kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
73	722	Common kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
74	735	Whitebreasted kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>

**Family : Coraciidae**

75	755	Indian roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>
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**Family : Upupidae**

76	763	Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
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**Family : Capitonidae**

77	782	Large green barbet	<i>Megalaima zeylanica</i>
78	784	Lineated barbet	<i>Megalaima lineata</i>
79	792	Coppersmith	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>

**Family : Picidae**

80	809	Blacknaped woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>
81	844	Woodpecker	<i>Picoides atratus</i>

**Family : Lanidae**

82	933	Grey shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>
83	945	Rufousbacked shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>
84	949	Brown shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>

**Family : Oriolidae**

85	959	Blackheaded oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthomus</i>
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**Family : Dicruridae**

86	963	Black drongo	<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>
87	971	Bronzed drongo	<i>Dicrurus aeneus</i>
88	973	Haircrested drongo	<i>Dicrurus hottentottus</i>
89	977	Greater R.T.drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>

**Family : Sturnidae**

90	1002	Pied myna	<i>Sturnus contra</i>
91	1006	Common myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
92	1009	Jungle myna	<i>Acridotheres fuscus</i>

**Family : Corvidae**

93	1032	Indian tree pie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>
94	1049	House crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
95	1054	Jungle crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>

**Family : Campephagidae**

96	1070	Wood Shrike	<i>Tephrodornis pondicerianus</i>
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**Family : Irenidae**

97	1098	Common lora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>
98	1103	Leaf Bird	<i>Chloropsis aurifrons</i>

**Family : Pycnonotidae**

99	1128	Redvented bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
100	1123	Whitecheeked bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus leucogenys</i>

**Family : Muscicapidae**

101	1265	Jungle babbler	<i>Turdoides striatus</i>
102	1538	Tailor bird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
103	1661	Magpie robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
104	1696	Stone chat	<i>Saxicola torquata przewalskii</i>





**Family : Motacillidae**

105	1854	Tree pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>
106	1874	Forest wagtail	<i>Motacilla indica</i>
107	1885	Pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba dukhunensis</i>
108	1884	Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cineria</i>

**Family : Nectarinidae**

109	1917	Purple sunbird	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>
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**Family : Zosteropidae**

110	1933	White eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosa</i>
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**Family : Ploceidae**

111	1934	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
112	1974	Spotted munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>

**Family : Emberizidae**

113	2047	Blackfaced bunting	<i>Emberiza spodocephala</i>
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Ref. Serial number of "A Pictorial Guide of the Birds of the Indian Sub-continent", by Salim Ali and S.D. Ripley, Bombay Natural History Society



## Bird attracting trees and Birds of Shevaroy and Kolli Hills

S Karthikeyan, 24, Opp. Banashankari Temple, 8th Block, Jayanagar PO, Bangalore 560 082

As part of the Tree Shrew project funded by World Wildlife Fund — US through World Wide Fund for Nature — India (Tamil Nadu State Office), I stayed at Yercaud a popular hill station ca. 32 km from Salem in South India. During my stay I also happened to gather information about various other fauna of the area.

Very close to my work spot there were one each of two species of trees which were of particular interest to me since they attracted many species of birds.

a) *Canthium dicoccum* Fam: Rubiaceae — 10 species of birds as listed were attracted to the fruit of the tree.

01	Small Green barbet	<i>Megalaima viridis</i>
02	Goldfronted chloropsis	<i>Chloropsis aurifrons</i>
03	Fairy bluebird	<i>Irena puella</i>
04	Redwhiskered bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>
05	Yellowthroated bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus xantholaemus</i>
06	Jungle babbler	<i>Turdoides striatus</i>
07	Blueheaded rock thrush	<i>Monticola cinclorhynchus</i>
08	Blue rock thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>
09	Whitethroated ground thrush	<i>Zosterops citrina</i>
10	Blackcapped blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>

b) *Firmiana colorata* Fam: Sterculiaceae — 5 species of birds were attracted for nectar of this tree.

01	Goldfronted chloropsis	<i>Chloropsis aurifrons</i>
02	Whitethroated babbler	<i>Dumetia hyperythra</i>
03	Jungle babbler	<i>Turdoides striatus</i>
04	Purplerumped sunbird	<i>Nectarinia zeylonica</i>
05	White-eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosa</i>

It is evident that the trees have been used mainly by forest birds. However, when these tree species are propagated in an urban setting bird species occurring in urban areas would naturally use them. Being indigenous species these trees have a good chance of surviving.

### Birds of Shevaroy and Kolli Hills, Eastern ghats

Shevaroy hills and Kolli hills are part of the southern Eastern Ghats. The former is a well known hill station and widely visited and the latter though has similar weather conditions is not much visited due to lack of facilities. A brief description of both the areas is given below.

Though I spent six months at Shevaroy many areas in the hill range were not visited. The visit to Kolli hills was very brief. Hence the list is by no means comprehensive.

The consolidated checklist of birds of both the hill ranges that follows is based on observations made during the Tree Shrew project.

Shevaroy : Almost six months (Feb to July 1992) were spent at Yercaud (11° 46' N, 78° 13' E) which is the main town and hill station located ca 32 km from Salem. It covers an area of 470 sq km and the highest point is the Servarayan temple peak (1700 m above MSL). Most of the hills have been brought under coffee plantation and some of the hillocks mined for aluminium. Hardly any sholas are left. While plenty of time was spent in the coffee plantations, on a few occasions the foothills were also visited.

Of the species listed for this region 23 species were seen involved in some breeding activity. Yellowthroated bulbul, black bulbul and wintering of pied ground thrush (also at Kolli hills) [(Karthikeyan, S (1994))] were interesting.

Kolli hills: The hill range was visited for three days from 07 March 1992 to 09 March 1992. The foothills areas was covered on the first day. The second day was spent at the top while the third was used to walk down from the top to the foothills. This hill range covers 490 sq km and the highest point is Kuzhivalavu at 1450 m above MSL. The day at the top was spent at Solakadu (1200 m above MSL; 11° 18' N, 78° 21' E). This region has seen development with the first good roads opening as recently as 1960s. Now large areas are under pineapple and tapioca.

The interesting sightings were that of the yellowbrowed bulbul (Karthikeyan, S communicated), Malabar whistling thrush, pied ground thrush, yellowthroated bulbul and the frequency of painted spurfowl encounters on the way to Solakadu from the foothills. Bluewinged parakeet listed here is based on the call heard. Sight confirmation would be desirable.

## References

Karthikeyan, S (1994): Some Notes on Pied Ground Thrush *Zoothera wardii* (Blyth). J Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. 9(1) : 145-146.

Karthikeyan, S (Communicated): Yellowbrowed Bulbul *Hypsipetes indicus* (Jordon) in the Kolli Hills (Tamil nadu), Eastern Ghats.

## Birds of Shevaroy Hills and Kolli Hills

Common Name &	Scientific Name	Shevaroy hills	Kolli hills
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## Family: Ardeidae

001 Pond heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>	+	-
002 Cattle egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	-	+

## Family: Accipitridae

003 Blackwinged kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	+	-
004 Crested honey buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>	+	+
005 Pariah kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	+	+
006 Brahminy kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>	+	+
007 Shikra	<i>Accipter badius</i>	+	+
008 White-eyed buzzard	<i>Butastur teesa</i>	+	-
009 Bonelli's hawk eagle	<i>Hieraaetus fasciatus</i>	+	-
010 Booted hawk eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	+	-
011 Black eagle	<i>Ictinaetus malayensis</i>	+	+
012 Crested serpent eagle	<i>Spilomis cheela</i>	+	+
013 Whitebacked vulture	<i>Gyps bengalensis</i>	-	+
014 Short-toed eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	+	+

## Family: Falconidae

015 Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	+	-
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## Family: Phasianidae

016 Grey partridge	<i>Francofinus pondicerianus</i>	-	+
017 Painted bush quail	<i>Perdica asiatica</i>	+	-
018 Red spurfowl	<i>Gallus asiatica</i>	+	-
019 Painted spurfowl	<i>Gallus lunulata</i>	+	+
020 Grey junglefowl	<i>Gallus sonneratii</i>	+	+

## Family: Rallidae

021 Whitebreasted waterhen	<i>Amourornis phoenicurus</i>	-	+
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## Family: Columbidae

022 Spotted dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	+	+
023 Emerald dove	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>	+	-

## Family: Psittacidae

024 Roseringed parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	-	+
025 Blossomheaded parakeet	<i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>	+	+
026 Bluewinged parakeet	<i>Psittacula columboides</i>	-	?

## Family: Cuculidae

027 Common hawk cuckoo	<i>Cuculus varius</i>	+	-
028 Indian cuckoo	<i>Cuculus micropterus</i>	+	-
029 Plaintive cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis passerinus</i>	-	?
030 Koel	<i>Eudynamis scolopacea</i>	-	+
031 Small greenbilled malkoha	<i>Rhopodytes viridirostris</i>	+	-
032 Sirkeer cuckoo	<i>Taccocua leschenaultii</i>	+	-
033 Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>	+	+

## Family: Strigidae

034 Collared scops owl	<i>Otus bakkamoena</i>	+	-
035 Barred jungle owlet	<i>Glaucidium radiatum</i>	+	+
036 Mottled wood owl	<i>Strix ocellata</i>	+	-

## Family: Caprimulgidae

037 Jungle nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus indicus</i>	+	-
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## Family: Apodidae

038 Palm swift	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>	+	+
039 Crested tree swift	<i>Hemiprocne longipennis</i>	+	+

## Family: Alcedinidae

040 Common kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	+	-
041 Whitebreasted kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smymensis</i>	+	+

## Family: Motropidae

042 Small green bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>	+	+
043 Bluebearded bee-eater	<i>Nyctomys athertoni</i>	+	-

## Family: Coraciidae

044 Blue Jay	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>	+	+
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## Family: Upupidae

045 Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	+	-
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## Family: Capitonidae

046 Large green barbet	<i>Megalaima zeylanica</i>	+	-
047 Small green barbet	<i>Megalaima viridis</i>	+	+
048 Coppersmith	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>	+	+

## Family: Picidae

049 Rufous woodpecker	<i>Micropternus brachyurus</i>	+	-
050 Small yellownaped woodpecker	<i>Picus chloropus</i>	+	-
051 Les. goldenbacked woodpecker	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>	+	+
052 Pygmy woodpecker	<i>Picoides nanus</i>	+	-

## Family: Pittidae

053 Indian pitta	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>	+	-
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## Family: Alaudidae

054 Ashy-crowned tinch lark	<i>Eremopterix grisea</i>	-	+
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## Family: Hirundinidae

055 Dusky crag martin	<i>Hirundo concolor</i>	+	+
056 Common swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	+	+
057 Redrumped swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>	+	+

## Family: Lanidae

058 Brown shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>	+	+
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## Family: Oriolidae

059 Golden oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	+	+
060 Blackheaded oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthomus</i>	+	+

## Family: Dicruridae

061 Black drongo	<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>	+	+
062 Grey drongo	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>	+	+
063 Whitebellied drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>	+	-
064 Bronzed drongo	<i>Dicrurus aeneus</i>	+	-
065 Racket-tailed drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>	+	+

**Family: Artamidae**

066	Ashy swallow shrike	<i>Artamus leucorhynchus</i>	+	-
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**Family: Sturnidae**

067	Greyheaded myna	<i>Sturnus malabaricus</i>	+	-
068	Brahminy myna	<i>Sturnus pagodarum</i>	+	+
069	Common myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	+	+
070	Jungle myna	<i>Acridotheres fuscus</i>	+	-

**Family: Corvidae**

071	Indian treepie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>	+	+
072	House crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	-	+
073	Jungle crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>	+	+

**Family: Campephagidae**

074	Pied flycatcher shrike	<i>Hemipus picatus</i>	+	-
075	Common wood shrike	<i>Tephrodornis pondicerianus</i>	+	-
076	Large cuckoo shrike	<i>Coracina novaehollandiae</i>	+	-
077	Blackheaded cuckoo shrike	<i>Coracina melanoptera</i>	+	+
078	Scarlet minivet	<i>Pericrocotus flammeus</i>	+	+

**Family: Irenidae**

079	Common iora	<i>Aegintha tiphia</i>	+	+
080	Goldfronted chloropsis	<i>Chloropsis aurifrons</i>	+	+
081	Goldmantled chloropsis	<i>Chloropsis cochinchinensis</i>	+	+
082	Fairy bluebird	<i>Irena puella</i>	+	-

**Family: Pycnonotidae**

083	Redwhiskered bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>	+	+
084	Redvented bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus caler</i>	+	+
085	Yellowthroated bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus xantholaemus</i>	+	HO
086	Whitebrowed bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus luteolus</i>	+	+
087	Yellowbrowed bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes indicus</i>	-	+
088	Black bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes madagascariensis</i>	+	-

**Family: Muscicapidae**

089	Spotted babbler	<i>Pellorneum ruficeps</i>	+	+
090	Slatyheaded scimitar babbler	<i>P. horsfieldii</i>	+	+
091	Whitethroated babbler	<i>Dumetia hyperythra</i>	+	+
092	Rufous babbler	<i>Turdoides subrufus</i>	+	-
093	Jungle babbler	<i>Turdoides striatus</i>	+	+
094	Whiteheaded babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>	-	+
095	Quaker babbler	<i>Alcippe poiocephala</i>	+	+
096	Brown flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa latirostris</i>	+	-
097	Rufoustailed flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa ruficauda</i>	+	+
098	Redbreasted flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa parva</i>	+	-
099	Whitebellied blue flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa pallipes</i>	-	?
100	Tickell's blue flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa tickelliae</i>	+	-
101	Verditer flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa thalassina</i>	+	-

102	Paradise flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>	+	+
103	Franklin's wren warbler	<i>Prinia hodgsonii</i>	+	+
104	Ashy wren warbler	<i>Prinia socialis</i>	-	+
105	Jungle wren warbler	<i>Prinia sylvatica</i>	+	-
106	Tailor bird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>	+	+
107	Blyth's reed warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>	+	+
108	Dull green leaf warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>	+	+
109	Large crowned leaf warbler	<i>Phylloscopus occipitalis</i>	+	+
110	Magpie robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	+	+
111	Shama	<i>Copsychus malabaricus</i>	+	-
112	Pied bushchat	<i>Saxicola caprata</i>	-	+
113	Indian robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicata</i>	+	+
114	Blueheaded rock thrush	<i>Monticola cinclorhynchus</i>	+	-
115	Blue rock thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	+	-
116	Malabar whistling thrush	<i>Myiophonus horsfieldii</i>	-	+
117	Pied ground thrush	<i>Zoothera wardii</i>	+	+
118	Whitethroated ground thrush	<i>Zoothera citrina</i>	+	-
119	Blackcapped blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	+	-

**Family: Paridae**

120	Grey Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	+	-
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**Family: Sittidae**

121	Velvetfronted nuthatch	<i>Sitta frontalis</i>	+	-
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**Family: Motacillidae**

122	Tree pipit	<i>Anthus spp</i>	+	-
123	Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	+	+
124	Large pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>	+	+

**Family: Dicaeidae**

125	Thickbilled flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum agile</i>	+	-
126	Tickell's flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>	+	+
127	Plain-coloured flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum concolor</i>	+	-

**Family: Nectarinidae**

128	Loten's sunbird	<i>Nectarinia lotenia</i>	+	+
129	Purple sunbird	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>	+	+

**Family: Zosteropidae**

130	White-eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosa</i>	+	-
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**Family: Ploceidae**

131	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	-	+
132	Yellowthroated Sparrow	<i>Petronia xanthocollis</i>	-	+
133	Baya	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>	-	+
134	Red munia	<i>Estrilda amandava</i>	-	+
135	Rufousbellied munia	<i>Lonchura kelaarti</i>	+	-
136	Spotted munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>	+	-

**Family: Fringillidae**

137	Common Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>	+	-
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HO — species identified based on call



## Bird watching at Dibru-Saikhowa wildlife sanctuary

SOUMYADEEP DATTA, Natures Beckon, Ward No 1, Dhubri, Assam 783 301

**D**ibru-Saikhowa is situated within the flood plain of the Brahmaputra in the Tinsukia district of Assam and is located between 27°35' and 27°50' N latitude and 95°10' and 95°40' E longitude. It consists of grassland and moist mixed

deciduous forest intercepted by natural water canals arising from the Brahmaputra. There are swampy areas scattered throughout the forest.

Besides the presence of myriad of avifauna, the sanctuary is the abode of a large population of elephants, tigers, leopards, water buffaloes, otters etc. There are many feral horses in this forest which is a unique feature of this sanctuary.

The average elevation of the sanctuary is 120 metres above sea level, having an average annual rainfall of 2875 mm. The average temperature varies between 7° to 32°C.

The prominent species of non aquatic grass found here are: Ekra *Phragmites karka*, Nal *Arundo donax*, Ulukher (*Imperata cylindrica*), Khagori *Saccharum* spp, Birina *E.ravannae*, Borota Kher *Saccharum elephantus*, San Kher *Polivna ciliata*, Dubori *Cynodon dactylon*, Locusa *H.Compresa*, Kahuwa *Saccharum spontenium*.

The aquatic grass and plants often visible in the swamps of Dibru-Saikhowa are: Dal *Andropogon* spp., Helochi *Enhydra flusians*, Barpuni *Pistia stratinotes*, Bhet *Nymphia* spp., Water Hyacinth *Meteka wichhornia species*.

Some of the major trees of this sanctuary are: Hollong *Dipterocarpus pilosus*, Simul *Bombax ceiba*, Amra *Spondias mangifera*, Sisso *Dalbergia sisoo*, Ajahar *Lagerstroemia flosreginae*, Khokan *Duabanga sonneratioides*, Urium *Bischofia javanica*, Sam *Artocarpus chaplasha*, Bola *Morus laevigata* and Bhar *Salix terasparma*.

Because of this diversity in plants and habitat various species of birds have found suitable niches at Dibru-Saikhowa.

It is no wonder that such a unique habitat provides shelter to the endangered white winged wood duck *Cairina scutulata* which is also found in limited areas of Assam and Arunachal. During our visit a large number of urium trees were full of berries which attracted thousands of grey fronted green pigeons *Treron pompadora*. They were present in every urium tree bringing the forest into animation. Mixed in their company there were pied mynas *Sturnus contra*, jungle myna *Acridotheres fuscus*, hundreds of redwhiskered bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus*, white cheeked bulbul *Pycnonotus leucogenys* and red vented bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*.

I have never come across such a congregation of terrestrial birds in one place. It was a fascinating scene.

Another important event during our bird watching at Dibru-Saikhowa was the spotting of a large group of black storks *Ciconia nigra*. The group was spotted on the 15th December at 9.05 am in a swamp known as Kolomi beel. There were altogether forty-six birds, out of which twenty-six were juvenile. The presence of a large number of juvenile birds led us to think that there must be a nesting colony in the vicinity of the swamp. We searched for the colony and asked the villagers about it. The villagers reported that at some distance from the swamp there was a wetland called "Katgarh". The black storks nest and breed on big trees around the Katgarh wetland.

This information was further confirmed by the forest guards (Baparam Bharali, Nabin Gohain and Jibakanta Dutta). Later on, Mr NC Sharma, Range Officer of the Guijan Wildlife Range also told us that he himself had seen the nesting and breeding of black storks at Katgarh wetland.

This finding is important because so far no breeding record of black storks in India has been reported (Reference: A field guide to the waterbirds of Asia, Wild Bird Society of Japan, 1993).

A list of other birds which we spotted at Dibru-Saikhowa is given below. Readers will note that some of these birds are candidate species for inclusion in the Red Data Book.

Sl.No.	English Name	Scientific Name
1	Little grebe	<i>Podiceps ruficollis</i>
2	Indian shag	<i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>
3	Little cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>
4	Pond heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>
5	Large egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
6	Smaller egret	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>
7	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
8	Cattle egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
9	Openbill stork	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>
10	Adjutant	<i>Leptoptilos dubius</i>
11	Lesser adjutant	<i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>
12	Spotbill duck	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>
13	Ruddy shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>
14	Large whistling teal	<i>Dendrocygna bicolor</i>
15	Greyheaded fishing eagle	<i>Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus</i>
16	Pallas's fishing eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucoryphus</i>
17	Brahminy kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>
18	Marsh harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
19	Crested serpent eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>
20	Bronzewinged jacana	<i>Metopidius indicus</i>
21	Purple moorhen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>
22	Redwattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>
23	Terek sandpiper	<i>Tringa terek</i>
24	Common sandpiper	<i>Tringa hypoleucos</i>
25	Marsh sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>
26	Speckled wood pigeon	<i>Columba hodgsonii</i>
27	Spotted dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>
28	Rufous turtle dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>
29	Indian ring dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
30	Alexandrine parkakeet	<i>Psittacula eupatria</i>
31	Roseringed parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
32	Crow-pheasant	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
33	House swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>
34	Palm swift	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>
35	Chestnut headed bee-eater	<i>Merops leschenaulti</i>
36	Common kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
37	Storkbilled kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>
38	Large green barbet	<i>Megalaima zeylanica</i>
39	Lesser golden backed woodpecker	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>
40	Small yellownaped woodpecker	<i>Picus chlorolophus</i>
41	Blackheaded cuckoo-shrike	<i>Coracina melanoptera</i>



42	Longtailed minivet	<i>Pericrocotus ethologus</i>
43	Goldentrouted chloropsis	<i>Chloropsis aurilrons</i>
44	Black drongo	<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>
45	Bronzed drongo	<i>Dicrurus aeneus</i>
46	Indian tree pie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>
47	Green magpie	<i>Cissa chinensis</i>
48	Jungle crow	<i>Corvus macrohynchos</i>
49	Sultan tit	<i>Melanochloa sultanea</i>
50	Grey tit	<i>Parus major</i>
51	Yellowbreasted babbler	<i>Macronous gularis</i>
52	Necklaced laughing thrush	<i>Garrulax moniligerus</i>
53	River chat	<i>Chaimarrornis leucocephalus</i>
54	Magpie robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
55	Stone chat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>
56	Blackbrowed red warbler	<i>Acrocephalus bistrigiceps</i>
57	Striated marsh warbler	<i>Megalurus plaustis</i>
58	Pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
59	Yellow wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
60	Greyheaded myna	<i>Sturnus malabaricus</i>
61	Common myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>



We could identify a total sixty-eight species of birds. There were some warblers and flycatchers which we failed to identify because of their fleeting movement and presence inside the bushes.

Another striking point which we observed here was that the number and species of wetland birds were far less than the number and species of terrestrial birds. This may be due to excessive fishing in the swamps by the forest villagers. But more detrimental was their practice of using poisons in the swamps for a large haul of fishes.

This point was raised during our discussion with the Chief Conservator of Forest (Wildlife), Assam. Appropriate measures should be taken to stop this menace.

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## Birds of Periyar Tiger Reserve and Random Notes

V SANTHARAM, 68, 1 Floor, Santhome High Road, Madras 600 028

As a part of the survey of the Indian great black woodpecker (*Dryocopus javensis*), I visited some forest areas in the Maharashtra Western Ghats in November 1995 and the Periyar Tiger Reserve, Kerala from 13-17 March 1996. During these visits, I came across a few species of birds, apparently not reported from here earlier.

On 18th November, I was surveying the Met Indavli area of the Koyna Wildlife Sanctuary, some 40 kms west of Satara. The habitat here was semi-evergreen with quite a few tall trees and fairly lush undergrowth. I was walking along the stream close to the trek path leading to the Vasota Fort, a favourite week-end camp site for several adventure-seekers from nearby areas. In some dense bushes, I detected movements and on focussing my binoculars, I located a small flock of blackcapped babblers (*Rhopocichla atriceps*). A little later, I located another group of 3-4 birds along the trek path, further away and also heard their harsh 'churrs'.

Another bird I saw along the stream was a brown breasted flycatcher (*Muscicapa muttui*), perched about a metre above the ground on a small shrub. This is a very familiar bird and I have seen it on several occasions in Madras and in southern Western Ghats in winter months. The whitish lores and the pale yellow legs were easily noticed.

I was pleasantly surprised to find a well-wooded reserve forest next to the Sawantwadi town (in the Sindudurg

district). The Narendra Hill reserve has moist deciduous vegetation with several large trees. On 23rd November, I heard two greyheaded bulbuls (*Pycnonotus priocephalus*) calling here and after some effort was able to locate a bird briefly as it flew away.

A visit to the Thalket Garden, the next day, yielded three more interesting birds. Partly managed as an orchard by the Forest Department, there is still quite a bit of moist deciduous forest left as a Reserve Forest. A couple of rubythroated bulbuls *Pycnonotus melanicterus gularis*, little spiderhunters *Arachnothera longirostris* and a blue-eared kingfisher *Alcedo meninting* were among those seen here. The last mentioned was my first sighting of this species and fortunately I had an excellent view of the bird, perched on a branch above a small stream. The bird allowed a close approach and permitted me to observe it for about 10 minutes. I could clearly see the blue on the head and ear-coverts, darker chestnut-red underparts, a small yellow-white patch on throat, a patch on the sides of the head, darker bluish-grey upper parts, red feet and dark bill.

None of these species have been reported in Humayun Abdulalis' checklist of Birds of Maharashtra (BNHS, 1981). In SD Ripley's 'Synopsis' (1982), these species have earlier been recorded upto Belgaum or North Kanara in the W.Ghats. However, Sawantwadi happens to be in the same latitudinal range as Belgaum. It is possible that several other species reported to occur upto Goa/North Kanara/Belgaum could occur in Sawantwadi as the forests here are contiguous with Goa/North Kanara.

At Periyar Tiger Reserve, I came across three species not mentioned in 'Birds of Periyar' by A Robertson and MCA Jackson (1992). On 14th March, I located two openbill storks (*Anastomus oscitans*) on dead trees in the lake beyond Edapalayam in the company of several other species of waterbirds. A single night heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* was seen in flight just outside the park entrance, heading towards the lake at dusk on 15th March. On 16th March, I encountered a pair of bluetailed bee-eaters *Merops philippensis* in the patch of forest near the Periyar house. One of them was seen perched on a dead branch of a roadside tree, briefly. I also saw a couple of little grebes (*Podiceps ruficollis*) near the boat landing, pointed out to me by Mr Girish kumar, a local naturalist. These were in non-breeding plumage. This species is very rare and only a single bird was seen at Periyar in 1969.

### Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the various forest department officials for their kind co-operation and help. The survey is being supported by the Wildlife Conservation Society, New York. I also thank Mr CS Swaminathan and Mr TP Girish Kumar who accompanied me to the field at Koyana and Periyar respectively.

### Large congregations of whitenecked (or woolly-necked) storks

In a recent issue of the Newsletter (NLBW 35: 112-113, Nov-Dec 1995), Dr Anwaruddin Choudhury presented a summary of his sight records of the whitenecked storks (*Ciconia episcopus*) in Assam. He found the bird was nowhere common and two was the most common group size. He also refers to the largest flock recorded in India but unfortunately has not given the number of birds present. In the editorial section of the same issue (p.102) Zafar Futehally quotes the records of the birds seen at Periyar Tiger Reserve, Kerala, where upto 9 birds were recorded once and a dozen birds seen in nearby lowland area.

I have also come across small numbers of these storks (2-4) in the wetlands around Madras and elsewhere. However, I had occasion to see fairly large congregations of these birds at the Vazhani Reservoir in the Trichur district of Kerala during 1992 and 1993.

On 21st February 1992, I spotted 16 birds at the reservoir and also watched with interest a wild dog (*Cuon alpinus*) half-heartedly stalking a stork for a few minutes before giving up and joining the rest of the pack. In 1993, I saw atleast 25 birds on 4 March, and two days later, I counted 50 birds along with egrets and two openbill storks (*Anastomus oscitans*). They were resting on a dried-up mudflat in the middle of the reservoir. On a later date (23 March), I noticed 30-40 storks including a few birds seen soaring in the thermals.

On a recent visit to Periyar (13-17 March 1996), I was able to see 10 whitenecked storks together at the Water's edge between the boat landing and Edapalayam on 15th March. The previous day, I had seen four birds flying at dusk

near Manakkavala Forest House. I had even seen a bird flying over the Kumily Town (4 kms from Thekkady) on 13th March. Going through my old notes, I find that I had never seen more than three birds at Periyar in all the five visits to the Tiger Reserve between 1986 and 1991.

### Record number of Indian Darters at Vedanthangal

We visited the Vedanthangal bird sanctuary, some 80 kms from Madras on 14-15 February 1996. We were happy to see a large number of waterbirds breeding in the lake this year despite a poor monsoon and low level of water in the sanctuary. But what was most thrilling was the presence of Indian Darters (*Anhinga melanogaster*) in big numbers. I counted 40 birds on a *Barringtonia* tree and another 30 birds were present on a bamboo clump. In addition, there were nearly 30 birds scattered in the other trees or flying about. Most of the darters seen were in adult plumage. I have been a regular visitor to the sanctuary since 1979 and I don't remember having come across more than 10-20 birds here on any visit.

The presence of about 100 darters at Vedanthangal is of great interest as it represents about 5% of the estimated population of this species in South Asia. The data generated from the Asian Waterfowl counts indicate that low numbers of darters are seen in the South Asian region and the species is now considered globally threatened.

### Reactions to a snake slough

I was returning to the forest station at Olakara on 15 March 1993, having completed my observations on woodpeckers that morning when my attention was drawn by the alarm calls given by some birds from a low bush, near the path. There were four purplerumped sunbirds (*Nectarinia zeylonica*) and a pair of tailorbirds (*Orthotomus sutorius*) moving about uneasily on the branches. Focussing my binoculars, I found the cause of their alarm — a snake slough some 2 feet in length, swaying in the breeze. The birds moved within inches of the shed skin, flicking their tails and drooping and shivering their wings and incessantly uttering their alarm calls. However, just a few feet away, but in full view of the shed skin, were a pair of ioras (*Aegithina tiphia*) and a male purple sunbird (*Nectarinia asiatica*) which did not exhibit any signs of alarm and moved about in the normal fashion.

### Sago Palm fruits in the diet of Jerdon's imperial pigeon

On 24 November 1995, while on a visit to Sawantwadi in southern Maharashtra in connection with the great black woodpecker Survey, I noticed a Jerdon's imperial pigeon (*Ducula badia*) feeding on the large reddish fruits of the Sago Palm (*Caryota urens*). The *Handbook* mentions that the bird feeds largely on fruits of *Ficus* and *Myristica*, which are swallowed entire. There is no mention of the *Caryota* fruits in its dietary. According to the "Flora of the Presidency of Madras", (3 vols) by Gamble, these fruits are geotose in shape and about 0.6 to 0.75 inches long.



## Sexual Dimorphism in barn owl (*Tyto alba*)

R KANAKASABAI, P NEELANARAYANAN and R NAGARAJAN, Division of Wildlife Biology, AVC College (Autonomous), Mannampandal 609 305 Mayiladuthurai

### Introduction

The common barn owl (*Tyto alba*) is a species of open country and is well known for its close association with man and agriculture. Barn owls are frequently observed in man-made structures in Nagapattinam Quaid-e-Milleth district, Tamilnadu. They are soft plumaged, big headed birds of prey with large eyes directed forward and surrounded by a facial disc. They are mainly nocturnal. The species is cosmopolitan (Burton, 1984) and in fact, it is one of the most widely distributed of birds (Marti, 1989).

The value of barn owls in checking rodent pests was reported recently by Neelananarayanan *et al.*, (1994) and attempts have been made to study the ecology and biology of barn owls in Nagapattinam.

Sexual dimorphism in barn owls has been studied by Colvin (1984) in New Jersey and by Looman (1985) in Utah, USA. The sex and age dimorphism in the barn owl has also been studied by Marti (1990). Literature review indicates that there is no information about the sexual dimorphism in barn owls from India. Therefore to fill up this lacuna an attempt has been made with the following objective.

- i) to study the morphological differences between sexes and to develop a criteria for sexing the adult barn owls and
- ii) to study the gonads of barn owls.

### Materials & Methods

The present study was carried out in four deceased and 12 live barn owls. The sexes of deceased and live owls were determined by a combination of morphological and behavioural traits as suggested by Marti (1990) and Anonymous (1993). The following keys were used for examining the morphological variations and for confirmation of sex.

- 1 Overall colouring of the back : Males are often *very light brown* or yellow buff with areas of light grey and perhaps some white showing. Females are often a *rich brown* with grey and this is slightly darker and more extensive.
- 2 Upper surface of the tail: Males are often light buff or white with barring either light grey or absent. Females are usually buff or brown with black or dark grey

barring. If the tail is light and has no barring at all, the owl is almost certainly male.

- 3 Upper surface of primary wing feathers: The leading half of each feather is usually light brown (or even white) with light grey barring in a male and brown with black or dark grey barring in a female. If the primaries are very pale with no barring, the owl is certainly male.
- 4 Throat area (a band about 3 cm wide, below the facial disc): In males of any age, the throat is almost always white. In females, the throat is often light brown or buff.
- 5 Sides of the head (an area about 1.5 cm to the sides of the facial disc): In a male (with a white throat) the area of white often extends upto either side of the head, to a point approximately level with the eyes. In a female (with or without a brown throat) these areas are usually light brown or buff.
- 6 Underside of wings (the underwing coverts from the carpal joint of the wing to the body): The underside of the wings are white in both sexes. The main thing to look for is spots, the size of which vary from the tiniest speck of black through to match-head sized. *An owl with no spots at all is almost certainly male.* Some males though do have spots at the carpal joint but these tend to be tiny. In a female the spots usually present around the carpal joint and may extend right across the wing to the body.
- 7 Underside of the body (the chest below the throat): Again spots vary in size and distribution in this white area. In a female, spots are usually present on the sides and may even extend right across the breast from one side to the other. An owl with match-head sized black spots right across the breast is definitely a female. Note, however that both males and females sometimes have only a few spots on each side but in males these tend to be tiny flecks.

After examining the morphological traits in the deceased birds they were dissected out for the confirmation of sex. The reproductive system of both sexes were dissected and the sexes were confirmed.

(This is an abbreviated version – Editor)



### Correspondence

COMMENTS ON THE NEWSLETTER. LAVKUMAR KHACHER, 646 Vastunirman, Gandhinagar 382 022

I was in the Palnis on the invitation of the Palani Hills Conservation Council (PHCC) of which you were a one time President. I was able to see how effectively the dynamics of

the Palnis have been shattered. Sholas are alive with birds, the eucalyptus, pine and wattle plantations devoid of them. People like us should be more concerned about such crass arrogance. What are we doing about this. I also do not see, or hear, any strong condemnation against the *Prosopis juliflora* menace officially supported by Forest Departments in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu.



Commenting on NL Vol.36, No.1 Jan/Feb 1996, may I suggest we omit references - for instance, space on references following the note "flocks of green Avadavat in Kanha Tiger Reserve" is as great as the note itself. It almost sound like when I attended a seminar in Kuwait, all the Arab delegates invoked a common preamble. Here we have the Salim Ali — Ripley. Martin Woodcock being invoked each time. Rather depressing really. In larger articles this does not cause discomfort, but for a note on sighting something? Really it is taking things too far. Let us not overdo the scientific nightmare.

\*

**POND HERONS AND OTTERS.** G MAHESWARAN, *Stork Ecology Project, Centre of Wildlife & Ornithology, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh 202 002, India*

On 8 and 9 March, 1996 I saw an interesting scene in Banketaal of Dudwa National Park in Uttar Pradesh. In the morning around 10.15 hrs on 8 March I saw 10 pond herons (*Ardeola grayii*) following an actively foraging family of Smooth Indian otter (*Lutra perspicillata*). There were 6 Otters (two adult and four young ones) foraging in the fringes of the wetland where wildrice (*Oryza* sp.) dominate the vegetation. All the otters moved towards the inundated grass area and caught a number of fish. When the otters moved around the fish and flies got disturbed and became victims of the pond herons. Whenever the otters moved, the pond herons followed. The Otters did not show any aggressiveness towards the pond herons. The next day also I observed a similar scene.

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**COMMENTS ON HIS PREVIOUS ARTICLE.** S ASHOK KUMAR, *Plot No.491, Road No.10, Jubilee Hills, Hyderabad 500 033.*

*[at the request of the Editor the author comments on his article in the previous issue, explaining why there is so much variation in the bird life of three water bodies all seemingly similar]*

Durgamma is a fairly large tank, containing fish, crustaceans, frogs, tadpoles, insects etc. The presence of little cormorants, grey herons, egrets, cotton teal, marsh harrier and kingfishers is indicative of the adequate availability of food notwithstanding the fishing operations conducted by the Cooperative Society. My enquiries reveal that these operations are carried out on a moderate scale. This tank appears to be the homeground of cotton teals as evidenced by the presence of chicks. The absence of other species of duck is obviously due to the fact that Miapur tank, which is just 6 kms away as the crow flies, provides a better supply of food including floating algae. This explains the presence of a large concentration of waterfowl in Miapur tank.

During the Asian Water Fowl Census, 1996, I had counted 17 little cormorants, 8 pond herons, 15 cattle egrets, 4 little egrets, 4 pintails, 109 cotton teal, 4 shovellers, 10 garganey teal, 16 redcrested pochards, 7 coots, 7 whitebreasted waterhens, 10 blackwinged stilts and 100 + unidentified ducks. The other factor for the presence of so

many waterfowl is the locational advantage — the tank abuts the National Highway No.9 and therefore it is in full public gaze discouraging poaching. Generally roadside wetlands in public gaze, provide a safe haven for birds.

Tummadi tank in close proximity to Durgamma tank is a tiny pond used by little cormorants, cotton teal and marsh harriers as a secondary feeding ground. They do not seem to stay put for they were not found in the late evening consecutively for three days.

The lack of floating vegetation and reed growth is perhaps the reason for the absence of purple moorhens and whitebreasted waterhen in Durgamma tank. These birds are however found in Tummadi and Bachpalli tanks which provide an ideal habitat with their vast floating vegetation and prolific reed growth. I presume that the few pintails, cotton teals and blackwinged stilts are the ones from Miapur tank that have strayed into Bachpalli tank.

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**RECENT SIGHTING OF REDNECKED GREBE AND MARBLED TEAL IN ASSAM.** HILLALJYOTI SINGHA, *C/o Late Dr B Hazarika, Pani Gaon, Poly Road, Nagaon 782 001*

Referring to the short note — "Red-necked Grebe in Assam — a new record" by Anwaruddin Choudhury (NLBW 1996, Jan/Feb 36(1): 13-14), I would like to give more information. On 18 January 1996, I led a team for waterfowl census conducted by AWB and IWRB to Laokhowa wildlife sanctuary (26.29 N, 92.45' E approx.) 20 km north-east from Nagaon town. In the morning we counted wetland birds in Saraloni beel (area 5 sq km; waterbody 3.5 sq km) — one of the largest beels in the sanctuary. In addition to 23 species of water-birds including greyheaded lapwing *Vanellus cinereus* and blackheaded gull *Larus ridibundus* in large number, we saw two unidentified grebes. We referred to the Pictorial Guide (1994) and 'A Field Guide to the Waterbirds of Asia' (Wild Bird Society of Japan, 1993) and were delighted to discover them to be rednecked grebe *Podiceps griseigena*. None of us had seen the bird before. They were in nonbreeding plumage. Laokhowa WLS is around 70 km from Pabitora WLS where Shri CR Bhobora had photographed two Rednecked Grebes in 1992-93.

Again on 21st January 1996, I went to Samaguri beel (62 Ha), 20 km east from Nagaon town for the same waterfowl census. The beel (26.26' N, 93.25' E approx.) is an oxbow lake very near to the 37 national highway and is famous for lesser whistling teal *Dendrocygna javanica* and cotton pygmy goose *Nettapus coromandelianus*. We counted 19 species of aquatic birds including fulvous whistling teal *Dendrocygna bicolor*. But we were surprised to see one marbled teal *Marmaronetta angustirostris*. It was swimming with a small flock of lesser whistling teal and was quite discernible among them. Then I realised that a few minutes earlier I had seen another bird in flight. We observed the swimming bird for more than half an hour. Prasanta Bordoloi took some of its photographs from different angles. This bird is a winter visitor to and uncommon in Assam (Choudhury, 1990). Prior to me Prof PC Bhattacharjee and Prasanta Saikia of Gauhati University had seen one Marbled

Teal in Kaziranga National Park and Bibhab Talukdar had seen one under the Kalia Bhomora bridge in the river Brahmaputra near Tezpur town two years back. I showed the photographs to Bidhab and Saikia who confirmed it to be a marbled teal. Anwaruddin Choudhury suggested the possibility of an albino lesser whistling teal, since it was found in the same flock and this cannot be ruled out. However, considering the morphological details it is likely to be a marbled teal.

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**BIRDS SEEN AT VALNUR, OOTACAMUND.** Dr ERIC & CHRIS LOTT, Communicated by Lt Gen BC Nanda, Coorg Wildlife Society, General Thimaya Circle, Madikeri 571 201, Kodagu, Karnataka.

"I enclose a list of birds we saw in this very short visit (March 4-5, 1996). The previous burning of undergrowth in the forest did not seem to have discouraged birds as one might expect. In fact this made viewing much easier, though photography more difficult, in that it was not easy to get close to birds on the whole. I did, however, manage to get good shots of malabar hornbill, forest wagtail and spotted piculet. I missed out on good opportunities with mottled woodowl and malabar trogon."

Little cormorant  
Pariah kite  
Cattle egret  
Jungle cock  
Redwattled lapwing  
Spotted dove  
Blossomheaded parakeet  
Roller  
Whitebreasted kingfisher  
Malabar hornbill  
Goldenbacked 3-toed woodpecker  
Wiretailed swallow  
Scarlet minivet  
Large cuckoo shrike  
Spotted owl  
Spotted piculet  
Black drongo  
Yellowcheeked tit  
Blackheaded babbler  
Jungle babbler  
Pied bush chat  
Magpie robin  
Blueheaded rockthrush  
Largecrowned leaf warbler  
Booted warbler



Greyheaded fishing eagle  
Brahminy kite  
Honey buzzard  
Whitebreasted waterhen  
Green sandpiper  
Rufous turtle dove  
Bluewinged parakeet  
Green bee-eater  
Storkbilled kingfisher  
Little green barbet  
Lesser goldenbacked woodpecker  
Swallow  
Pied flycatcher-shrike  
Mottled woodowl  
Hawkowl  
Greater racket-tailed drongo  
Jungle crow  
Scimitar babbler  
Whitethroated babbler  
Indian blue chat  
Indian robin  
Shama  
Orangeheaded ground thrush (white throated)  
Yellowbrowed leaf warbler  
Blyth's reed warbler

Brownbreasted flycatcher  
Black naped flycatcher  
Smaller grey cuckoo shrike  
Ashy swallow shrike  
Common lora  
Redvented bulbul  
Rubythroated bulbul  
Little spiderhunter  
White eye  
Whitebacked munia  
Large pied wagtail  
Grey wagtail  
Jungle myna  
Hill myna  
Purplerumped sunbird  
Greenbilled malkoha  
Crimsonbreasted barbet  
Velvetfronted nuthatch  
Goldfronted chloropsis



Tickell's blue flycatcher  
Brown shrike  
Blackheaded cuckoo shrike  
Large woodshrike  
Redwhiskered bulbul  
Yellowbrowed bulbul  
Golden oriole  
Shag  
Malabar trogon  
Hawk cuckoo  
Forest wagtail  
Greyheaded myna  
Common myna  
Small sunbird  
Plain flower pecker  
Crimsonthroated barbet  
Indian pitta  
Red spurfowl



**WHITE STORK IN HOSKOTE.** S. AMRUTH, 115, Upstairs, Gandhi Bazaar, Basavanagudi, Bangalore 560 004

On Monday, the 4th of Dec '95, I went with my friend N.R. Swamy to the Hoskote Tank on the Old Madras Road for a routine visit. At about 9 a.m. we started walking along the periphery and on the bed of the tank which was almost dry, except for a small puddle of water. We saw a small flock of open billed storks (*Anastomus ascitans*) wading in the shallow water. We also saw some large white birds which turned out to be white storks (*Ciconia ciconia*). They were 27 in number. On our approaching closer they took to the air and settled on the far side of the tank, mixing with another flock of whitestorks. We reached the far side and made the final count of 66 white storks including the flock of 27 birds. This is probably the second highest count of this bird, the highest being that of 85 birds sighted in 1990 (Sridhar et al, 1990). We observed the birds for quite a long time. At about 11.30 a.m. they took off towards Bangalore, on being disturbed by the villagers who landed with their live- stock. We feel that such a congregation of these birds is significant.

Some of the other birds that were spotted were garganeys (*Anas querquedula*), black winged stilt *Himantopus himantopus*, green sand piper *Tringa ochropus*, wood sand piper *Tringa glareola*, common sand piper *Tringa hypoleucos*, little ringed plover *Charadrius dubius* & green shank *Tringa nebularia*.

## Reference :

Sridhar, S (1990), A record flock of white storks sighted in Karnataka NLBW 30 (3+4) : 10.

BWFCB (1994) Annotated Checklist of the birds of Bangalore (pp92).



**HOUBARA BUSTARD SIGHTED IN SORSAN  
BRAHMANIMATA PROPOSED SANCTUARY IN SOUTH  
EAST RAJASTHAN. BHARAT SINGH, Bhim Nivas,  
Gumanpura, KOTA 324 007**

A houbara bustard *Chlamydotis undulata macqueenii* was sighted on 4th December 1995, in the evening on a cold cloudy day within the Sorsan-Brahmanimata proposed sanctuary in Baran district in south east Rajasthan. This is the eastern most record of a Houbara bustard as the site is approximately located on 76-E longitude and 25-N latitude. The bird was watched with a binocular at a close range as it was moving among the *Zizyphus* bushes close to a mustard field. The movement of its long thin neck in typical camel like fashion helped in the identification. The shape of the head and tufts of feathers of the crown & neck were also prominent. White and very round mirror on each wing with black primaries was another indicator of the species in flight. I had been repeatedly sighting this bird for the last two winters but never got a close and clear view. The Sorsan Brahmanimata proposed sanctuary is one of the last few resorts of the Great Indian bustard. The undulating boulder strewn land supports rough grasses and *Zizyphus*. Some cultivation does take place on the northern boundary from where the right main canal passes. It is in this locality that the houbara was seen. The local forest guard saw the bird thrice during the month & then on 24th January 1996, Rakesh Vyas and Dr.V.G. Gokhale (Pers. Com.) saw it moving on the margin of the cultivation. They were able to photograph the bird with a normal lens. I do not consider it to be a straggler, since the bird stayed through the winter months and it was sighted in previous years also. It is a case of eastward range extension of houbara bustard, worth recording.

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**THE UNDELIVERED SPEECH. VINOJ MATHEW PHILIP,**  
*Environmental Resources Research Centre, P.B.1230,  
Perookada, Trivandrum 695 005.*

It was with great interest that I read "The Undelivered Speech" (Special Address at OSI Meet, Delhi), of Zafar Futehally in Vol.36 No.1 Jan-Feb 1996 of N.L.B.W. I was moved by his pleas to get our administrators interested in ornithology, and equally important, to create urban environments free from crows.

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**AN UNUSUAL DIET OF THE INDIAN ROLLER - *Coracias benghalensis* (Linnaeus).** PROF. A. RELTON, *Nature Club  
Bishop Heber College, P.O.Box 615, TRICHY 620 017,  
Tamil Nadu*

On the 28th of March, I was observing a group of grey and yellow wagtails, a pair of black drongos and a few common mynas in a paddy field, just harvested, near Tiruchirappalli, Tamilnadu. The workers were bundling the harvested paddy. The birds were busy feeding on the insects which were flying or running around the paddy plants after the harvest.

A single Indian roller joined the group of birds in the field. It selected a perch, a wooden cross in the paddy field

(probably used by the Christian land owner) and started to feed on insects both in the air and on the land.

Suddenly a small snake, striped keel back *Amphiesma stolata* (Tamil name Oolai pambu) 1 foot long emerged from the harvested paddy plants on to the open field. The other birds raised an alarm and flew away, but the roller flew close to the snake and caught it in its bill. The snake was alive and struggling to free itself. The roller battered the snake against the wooden cross till it died and then swallowed its head first.

The Book of Indian Birds (Ali S. 1979) states that its food includes insects, frog or lizards. Whether or not the snake forms a common food item for the bird is not known.

\*

**CURIOUS BEHAVIOUR OF COMMON WOOD SHRIKES**  
*Tephrodornis pondicerianus.* S.N. VARU, *Junavas Madhapar  
Kutch 370 020, J.K. TIWARI, Research Officer, Wildlife and  
Environment, Sanghi Cements, Sanghipuram, Moti-Ber,  
Abdhasa, Kutch 370 655*

On 28th January 1996, we were birdwatching in a dry river bed, adjoining a tropical thorn forest near Ramvada, in Kutch, Gujarat.

Apart from many usual species of birds that we were encountering e.g. small minivet *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus* Marshall's Iora *Aegithina nigrolutea* etc. we saw many common wood shrikes *Tephrodornis pondicerianus*. The interesting point was that, they were seen frequently on the riverbed walking on the sand in the manner of pipits, and picking up tit-bits from the ground.

The wood shrikes were probably catching insects flushed by our movements. The above behaviour seems curious and undescribed in literature.

\*

**ALBINO COOT 'FULICA ATRA' SIGHTED NEAR KOTA.**  
ANIL NAIR and RAKESH VYAS, *Hadoti Naturalists Society,  
2 p 22, Vigyan Nagar, KOTA 324 005*

Albinism does occur among birds and animals although rarely. The loss of pigmentation could be complete or partial. During December 1995 a pure white coot was sighted among 6000 coots, which flock at Ummedganj every year during winter. The place is ideally suitable for these birds which primarily feed on floating and submerged aquatic vegetation. It was on a cold winter morning that we saw a pure white bird with only a few black breast feathers. The albino coot looked quite normal and at ease among its all black brethren. No apartheid was observed. The Bill was pinkish white unlike greyish white of other coots. The bird stayed throughout winter and was repeatedly sighted upto February.

An albino ruff '*Philomachus pugnax*' was also sighted by the second author in November 1994 at Lakhawa Village tank in a flock of about 200 birds. The albino bird had strikingly white feathers with pink bill and legs. Only two primaries in each wing were grey. As Albinism is a rare phenomenon it is being reported.

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**FEEDING BEHAVIOUR OF INDIAN KOEL (*Eudynamis scolopacea*) ON MALE FLOWERS OF PAPAYA PLANT**  
K.S. JOSE, Tc5/376, Plavilaveedu, Perurkada P.O., TRIVANDRUM 695 005

On 11.02.95 at 5 p.m. I saw a male Koel eating the tender parts of the male flowers of the papaya plant. After sometime, both a male and female flew to this papaya plant and ate male papaya flowers.

\*

**IS RED LEGGED POND HERON A FEMALE.**  
PROF. A. RELTON, Staff Advisor, Nature Club, Bishop Heber College, TRICHY 620 017

On 25th May 1996, I was travelling between Tiruchirapalli and Karur. Our bus stopped in a place called Kulithalai. I saw a local Gypsy tribe (Narikuravan/Kuruvikar - means Bird man) selling birds he shot with his gun. He had a pair of Indian pond herons *Ardeola grayii*, 3 koels *Eudynamis scolopacea*, 3 spotted doves *Streptopelia chinensis* and a white breasted water hen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*. Suddenly I noticed one of the pond heron with red legs. I got down from the bus to have a closer look. I have been looking for red legged pond herons since 1990 and I have identified red legged pond herons on three occasions last year (between May - August 1995).

The first time I saw 17 nesting birds in a village called Nallumoolai-sungam between Pollachi and Valparai in a Peepal tree *Ficus religiosa* of which 7 were having either red or bright orange legs. Then in a tamarind tree (*Tamarindus indica*) in a place close to Vathalkundu on the way to Kodaikanal, three pond herons with red legs were identified. Finally in Ramanathapuram in a mixed heronry of little egrets, cormorants, grey herons, pond herons and night herons. I noticed 8 pond herons and 2 night herons with red legs.

So in order to examine the bird, I bought the pair of pond herons for Rs.25. Both the birds were in their breeding plumage with maroon hair like plumes on their back and long white occipital crest. The red legged bird was smaller than the other.

I opened the birds with the hope of identifying their sex. The red legged pond heron was a female, it had a cluster of 6 small eggs, whereas the other bird did not have any.

In earlier reports by (Humayun Abdul Ali and Alexander 1952, Wesley 1993, 1996) no sex identification was established. On earlier occasions I have noticed red legged pond herons sitting inside the nest either with eggs or with nestlings. So I am of the opinion that all red legged pond herons are females, but it requires more confirmation.

I have observed one more interesting feature in the legs of both the birds. I saw a small saw teeth like projection in the middle of their toe, on the upper side of the claws in both legs. I don't know whether it appears during breeding season, to help the bird to clean its plumes or it is a permanent feature.

Since I could not take the whole bird with me, I cut the legs gave the remaining bird to the Gypsy himself and left for my destination. There I took photographs of the legs.

**Acknowledgement :**

I thank my brother A. Watson Thamburaj and Prof. A. Alagappa Moses for their help and the drawing.

**References :**

- Neginhal, S.G. (1982) The birds of Ranganthittu, J.BNHS 72(3) 581 - 583.  
Wesley, H.D. (1993) Genetics of the red tarsi and feet in the Pond Heron NLBW 33(4) : 73  
Wesley, H.D. (1996) More Red-legged Pond Herons NLBW 36(1) : 5

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**Announcements**

**BIRDS OF PERIYAR**

Robertson (Andrew) & Jackson (Michael C.A.). **BIRDS OF PERIYAR** - an aid to birdwatching in Periyar Sanctuary, Kerala, S.India. 226 x 167 mm ; 125 pages ; map and line drawings. The book can be ordered by sending demand draft of Rs.110/- (Rs.10/- for packing and postage) payable to Tourism and Wildlife Society of India, Jaipur.

'C-158-A, Dayanand Marg, TilakNagar, Jaipur - 302 004'

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**CANDIDATES FOR ASIAN RED DATA BOOK. AASHEESH PITTIE, 8-2-545 "Prem Parvat", Road No.7, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500 034**

The modus-operandi for collecting information on candidate species for the Asian Red Data Book project has changed slightly. Now, instead of Zonal-coordinators, species-compilers have been appointed to compile data on selected species.

I will compile notes for the following six species.

1. Sykes's Crested Lark *Galerida deva*.
2. Malabar Crested Lark *Galerida malabarica*.
3. Forest Owlet *Athene blewitti*.
4. Broadtailed Grassbird *Schoenicola platyura*.
5. Brownwinged Kingfisher *Pelargopsis amauropterus*.
6. Brownbreasted Flycatcher *Muscicapa muttui*.

I request readers of the Newsletter to send me their notes and observations on these species as soon as possible, since a first draft has to be submitted in November 1996. Needless to say, all contributions will be acknowledged in the final printed volume.

\*

**PHEASANTS OF INDIA AND THEIR AVICULTURE. KR. SURESH SINGH, Auto House, B Singar Singh Bldg. Lal Bagh, Lucknow 226 001**

I am pleased to inform you that my book on pheasants has recently been published by Wildlife Institute, Dehradun. It is titled Pheasants of India and their Aviculture (ISBN 81-85496-00-5, Price Rs.150/-). It contains the following chapters - 1. Systematics 2. Census 3. Aviculture 4. Feeding

and Nutrition 5. Stock and Breeding 6. Elective Breeding 7. Incubation 8. Hatching and Rearing 9. Reintroduction and Release 10. Diseases 11. Appendices. It covers 176 pages, and has many coloured illustrations, both painting and photographs all by the authors.

The publication was unnecessarily delayed and the get-up should have been better. However, I have done the best under the circumstances.

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## BIBLIOGRAPHIC INDEX

"Copies of the recently published A BIBLIOGRAPHIC INDEX TO THE ORNITHOLOGY OF THE INDIAN REGION, PART I, compiled by Aasheesh Pittie, are available for sale with the author at the following address. Aasheesh Pittie, 8-2-545 Road No. 7, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500 034. This publication covers *Stray Feathers* (1873-1881), volumes 1-10 and *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* (1886-1993), volumes 1-90. Price in India, Rs. 150 plus Rs. 13 for postage (Registered Parcel). Mode of payment M.O., D.D. (payable at Hyderabad) or Cheque (Rs. 10 extra for outstation cheques)."

## Conservation and Development – Who Foots the Bill ? – S.A. HUSSAIN\*

At the first meeting of the Inter-governmental Committee on the Convention on Biological Diversity in Geneva three years ago, delegates from some "most developed" countries were at great pains to urge why everybody else should be concerned about the pitfalls of "development". Europe, it was lamented, relied too much on high-tech methods to develop its agro-economy, at the cost of its all too meagre biodiversity. Biologically rich but economically weak developing countries were strongly urged to conserve precious natural resources at all costs. How are delegates from the "developing" countries expected to receive this? Should all development stop so that biodiversity can be conserved for everyone's sake?

What does the term "development" imply? Does it mean a lifestyle ensconced in air-conditioned comfort with push button technology at your fingertips? Does it mean that without electric can openers one cannot eat one's dinner and escalators are indispensable to shopping malls? Is being "developed" as is generally understood, the ultimate achievable goal for the survival of humankind and the entire world? The world is obsessed with this great divide between the so-called "developed" and the "developing" (whatever that means). The yard stick this is measured by is dictated solely by what the "developed" possess.

It is ironic that while captains of development fret about energy problems, global warming and rapid depletion of the resources that prop up their lifestyles, the *Oreng asli* under his thatched roof in a remote Malaysian rainforest is surrounded by the richest natural resources one can ask for. He may not have an electric toothbrush to clean his teeth, but at least he does not have to worry about how and where to dispose of nuclear waste.

Miraculously, life goes on Earth no matter where one lives. People and materials move about whether there is a twelve-lane expressway or not; babies are born whether one has medical insurance or not; diseases or disasters affect both the inhabitants and the environment whether one lives in an undeveloped neighbourhood or not.

One needs to compare the energy required to support an average family unit in a "developed" country with that of the cost of maintaining a less "developed" household to estimate the trade-off between development and conservation for both cases. It means that the "have nots" must not overly increase their demands on the environment so as to catch up with the lifestyles of the "haves", and by that, they can exert less pressure on the existing resources. On the other hand, the "developed" should shed the uneasential, energy guzzling and polluting extra trappings of their lifestyles to lessen the pressure on the resources. The aspirations of one and the concerns of the other could be resolved and a balanced meeting ground could be reached. However, will anyone listen to this? Some of us who care for nature and its bounty are sometimes horrified to see a few hornbill feathers stuck on the head of a reigning tribal chieftain in his native rainforest. Yet somewhere out there, our wonderful "developed" and "developing" economies are relentlessly churning out monstrous species that cut, slash, tear, drain, pollute, devastate, trample and kill our forests, wetlands, habitats and people - all in the name of "development"!

Better late than never, the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity seem to have come together to take a serious look at these problems. From Geneva to the Bahamas to Jakarta the dialogue has continued relentlessly. Some agreement on the basic mechanisms for implementing the Convention seems to have been achieved. Whether by sheer necessity or by compulsion, the political will to move forward seems to have been demonstrated by the Contracting Parties - not withstanding problems and setbacks that are inherent to any multilateral negotiations. The buck needs to be stopped somewhere.

\* Council Member, Birdlife International

Courtesy : World Bird Watch, June 1996

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Cover : Grey Hornbill (*Tockus birostris*). Has a peculiar pointed casque surmounted on the beak. Seen in fairly well-wooded areas, with fig trees. Makes a variety of loud cackling and squealing calls. Food includes berries, beetles, lizards and an occasional scorpion.

Photo : S. Sridhar, ARPS